

Debate Pack

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World Menopause Month

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Background

A general debate on World Menopause Month will take place in the Commons Chamber on 21 October 2021. The subject for this debate was determined by the [Backbench Business Committee](#). Carolyn Harris (Labour) and Caroline Nokes (Conservative) will lead the debate.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) defines the menopause as a gradual process, typically taking place over several years, during which a “woman stops having periods” and reaches the “end of her natural reproductive life”.¹ It is said to have taken place when a period has not occurred for 12 months.²

The menopause is caused by changes to the balance of the body’s sex hormones that regulate menstruation. Oestrogen levels decrease with age, leading to periods becoming less frequent, before they eventually stop. The transition phase before menopause – when periods become irregular – is often referred to as ‘perimenopause’.³ The menopause thus affects women and other people whose oestrogen levels are declining, which could include trans people and non-binary people. The menopause may also be prompted by certain underlying health conditions, some cancer treatments, and treatments related to the removal of the ovaries.⁴

The average age of menopause in the UK is 51 years, though NICE notes that the timing can vary, with “1 in 100 women” experiencing the menopause “before the age of 40 years”. This is known as “premature menopause”.⁵

Around 8 out of 10 women will experience menopausal symptoms that are caused by the change in the balance of hormones, according to NICE.⁶ The most common symptoms are hot flushes and night sweats. Other menopausal symptoms include:

- mood changes;
- memory and concentration loss;
- vaginal dryness;
- a lack of interest in sex;
- headaches;

¹ NICE, [Menopause: diagnosis and management \(Context\)](#), NICE guideline [NG23], Published: 12 November 2015 Last updated: 05 December 2019

² Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, [Menopause - a life stage](#), not dated

³ Johns Hopkins Medicine, [Perimenopause](#), not dated

⁴ NHS, [Overview: menopause](#), 29 August 2018

⁵ NICE, [Menopause: diagnosis and management \(Context\)](#), NICE guideline [NG23], Published: 12 November 2015 Last updated: 05 December 2019

⁶ NICE, [Menopause: diagnosis and management \(Context\)](#), NICE guideline [NG23], Published: 12 November 2015 Last updated: 05 December 2019

- joint and muscle stiffness.⁷

The Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists emphasise that “each woman is different” and thus the type, severity and duration of symptoms will vary.⁸ All symptoms, however, can have a significant impact on quality of life; the NHS notes that symptoms “usually start a few months or years before your periods stop [and] last around 4 years from your last period”.⁹

Treatments for menopausal symptoms include hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).

The following sources provide more information on the menopause:

- NHS, [Menopause](#), August 2018
- Women’s Health Concern, [Factsheet: The menopause](#), November 2019
- Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, [Menopause and women’s health in later life](#)
- [The British Menopause Society](#)

The Commons Library briefing, [Support for people experiencing menopausal symptoms](#), contains an overview of recent work undertaken by the Government Equalities Office on the menopause, with statistics on the numbers affected.

⁷ NICE, [Menopause: diagnosis and management \(Context\)](#), NICE guideline [NG23], Published: 12 November 2015 Last updated: 05 December 2019

⁸ Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, [Menopause - a life stage](#), not dated

⁹ NHS, [Symptoms: menopause](#), 29 August 2018

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World Menopause Month

The [International Menopause Society](#) (IMS) designates October as World Menopause Month, with World Menopause Day held every year on the 18th October. The IMS explains that the purpose of the day (and month) is to “raise awareness of the menopause and the support options available for improving health and wellbeing”.¹⁰

This year, the IMS has chosen ‘bone health’ as the theme for World Menopause Day 2021.

NICE notes that a prolonged lack of oestrogen affects the bones and cardiovascular system, leaving those who are postmenopausal at increased risk of a number of long-term conditions, such as osteoporosis (a bone disease that causes bones to become weak and break more easily).¹¹ Women’s Health Concern (the patient arm of the British Menopause Society (BMS)) emphasises that, unlike hot flushes, there are often no obvious symptoms of osteoporosis and that the first sign is usually the fracture of a bone.¹²

The IMS has produced several resources on bone health to accompany World Menopause Day:

- [Patient Information Leaflet: Update on bone health \(PDF, 15.1 MB\)](#)
- [Awareness Raising Poster: Bone Health \(PDF, 2.3MB\)](#)
- [Update on bone health: the IMS White Paper \(PDF, 163\)](#)

¹⁰ International Menopause Society, [World Menopause Day](#), 2021

¹¹ NICE, [Menopause: diagnosis and management \(Context\)](#), NICE guideline [NG23], Published: 12 November 2015 Last updated: 05 December 2019

¹² Women’s Health Concern, [Factsheet: The menopause](#), November 2019

3 Parliamentary material

3.1 Select committee inquiry

The Women and Equalities Committee [launched](#) the inquiry, [An invisible cohort: Why are workplaces failing women going through menopause?](#) in July 2021. The inquiry set out to examine [menopause and the workplace](#), particularly focusing on the “nature and the extent of discrimination faced by women experiencing the menopause”.¹³ The Government is currently developing its [Women’s Health Strategy](#) and the Women and Equalities Committee said it will present its “findings and recommendations with a view to shaping policies redressing gender equality”.¹⁴

3.2 All Party Parliamentary Group on Menopause

The [APPG on Menopause](#) states that it was created by parliamentarians to “provide a platform to tackle the lack of understanding around Menopause amongst policymakers, the public and employers”.¹⁵ It is currently running an inquiry on “Assessing the impacts of Menopause and the case for policy reform”.¹⁶

3.3 Menopause (Support and Services) Bill, 2021-22

The [Menopause \(Support and Services\) Bill, 2021-22](#) is a Private Members’ Bill that was presented to Parliament through the ballot procedure. The Bill is sponsored by Carolyn Harris (Labour). The Bill’s main aim is to exempt hormone replacement therapy from NHS prescription charges.

¹³ [News article: An invisible cohort: Why are workplaces failing women going through menopause?](#), Women and Equalities Committee, 23 July 2021

¹⁴ [News article: An invisible cohort: Why are workplaces failing women going through menopause?](#), Women and Equalities Committee, 23 July 2021

¹⁵ APPG Menopause, [Challenging current policy in Parliament](#), not dated

¹⁶ APPG Menopause, [Current Inquiry – Assessing the impacts of Menopause and the case for policy reform](#), 2021

3.4 Statement

Commons statement followed by questions: [Women's Health Strategy](#)

HC Deb 8 March 2021 | Vol 690 c535-

Repeated and followed by questions in the Lords: [Women's Health Strategy](#)

HL Deb 9 March 2021 | v810 c1476-

3.5 Debates

Lords debate: [Women's health outcomes](#)

HL Deb 8 July 2021 | Vol 813 c1490-

Westminster Hall debate: [Menopausal Symptoms: Support](#)

HC Deb 9 June 2021 | Vol 696 c428WH-

3.6 PQs

[Menopause: Prescriptions](#)

Asked by: Brown, Mr Nicholas

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what support for prescription costs is available for women experiencing the menopause.

Answering member: Edward Argar | Department: Department of Health and Social Care

Women experiencing the menopause are not included in the list of people entitled to free prescriptions. Eligibility depends on having a qualifying medical condition, the patient's age, whether they are in qualifying full-time education, whether they are pregnant or have recently given birth, or whether they are in receipt of certain benefits or a war pension.

However, people on a low income who do not qualify for an exemption may be eligible for full or partial help with prescription charges through application to the NHS Low Income Scheme. People who need a number of prescriptions each month can buy a prepayment certificate which can help reduce costs significantly. A holder of a 12-month certificate can get all the prescriptions they need for just over £2 per week.

HC Deb 23 September 2021 | PQ49036

[Menopause](#)

Asked by: Thomas, Gareth

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what additional steps his Department will take to reduce the stigma of menopause; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Ms Nadine Dorries | Department: Department of Health and Social Care

From September 2020, relationships, sex education and health education became compulsory in all state funded schools. As part of this, pupils are taught about menstrual health and the menopause.

On 8 March, we launched a 14-week call for evidence as part of the first Government-led Women's Health Strategy for England. The online survey within the call for evidence seeks information on the menopause. By better understanding women's experiences, we can ensure key parts of the health service are meeting their needs. We will respond to the call for evidence after the summer and we aim to publish the Women's Health Strategy before the end of the year.

HC Deb 22 June 2021 | PQ 2874

[Menopause](#)

Asked by: Mitchell, Mr Andrew

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps his Department has taken to improve the training GPs and other medical professionals receive on the treatment of perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms.

Answering member: Ms Nadine Dorries | Department: Department of Health and Social Care

Each medical school in the England sets its own undergraduate curriculum which must meet the standards set by the General Medical Council (GMC) in its Outcomes for Graduates. The GMC updated the Outcomes for Graduates in 2018, following extensive engagement and consultation with medical education experts. The GMC would expect that, in fulfilling these standards, newly qualified doctors are able to identify, treat and manage any care needs a person has, including the menopause and perimenopause.

The training curricula for postgraduate trainee doctors is set by the relevant Royal College and must also meet the standards set by the GMC. The

perimenopause and menopause are included in the curriculum set by the Royal College of General Practitioners and emphasised in the College's clinical topic guides, which supplement the curriculum.

HC Deb 21 June 2021 | PQ 16019

[Menopause](#)

Asked by: Halfon, Robert

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that women who are diagnosed with early menopause are (a) referred to specialists and (b) receiving regular checks.

Answering member: Ms Nadine Dorries | Department: Department of Health and Social Care

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines for menopause were updated in December 2019 and include criteria for the diagnosis, investigation and treatment of early menopause. NHS England and NHS Improvement expect all providers to give due regard to NICE's guidance.

After diagnosis has been confirmed in primary care, women with premature ovarian insufficiency (POI) or early menopause are generally referred to a specialist menopause clinic. The clinic will conduct further tests and, where appropriate, women will be offered treatment and fertility advice. After the initial consultations, women with POI should be reviewed after three months to assess the efficacy of their treatment. Further appointments should then be tailored to the needs of the individual.

HC Deb 02 June 2021 | PQ 4580

[Menopause](#)

Asked by: Halfon, Robert

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support women who have been diagnosed with early menopause.

Answering member: Ms Nadine Dorries | Department: Department of Health and Social Care

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines for menopause were updated in December 2019 and include clear criteria for the diagnosis, investigation and treatment of early menopause. NHS England and NHS Improvement expect all providers to give due regard to NICE guidance.

Treatment for early menopause usually involves Hormone Replacement Therapy or a combined hormonal contraceptive pill both for relief of symptoms and to prevent against the long-term consequences of oestrogen deficiency. Women diagnosed with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency are generally managed in a specialised menopause clinic and should have regular reviews to assess the efficacy of treatment and to be offered fertility advice if appropriate. NHS.UK provides signposting to a range of counselling and support groups, such as the Daisy Network and to fertility support groups, where necessary.

HC Deb 17 May 2021 | PQ 681

[Ovarian Cancer: Menopause](#)

Asked by: Shannon, Jim

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has with (a) the Royal College of Nursing and (b) other relevant bodies on potential links between ovarian cancer and the start of menopause.

Answering member: Jo Churchill | Department: Department of Health and Social Care

No discussions with the Royal College of Nursing, or other organisations, have taken place regarding the link between ovarian cancer and the start of the menopause.

Research suggests women with ovarian cancer may experience early menopause due to disease infiltration of the ovaries or because of the surgery or adjuvant therapy that they need to have to remove the cancer.

Women are advised to contact their general practice if they have any symptoms or concerns.

HC Deb 11 November 2020 | PQ 98968

[Females: Health](#)

Asked by: Champion, Sarah

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when Public Health England plans to publish its Women's Reproductive Health Action plan; and whether his Department plans to use that strategy to inform his Department's women's health strategy.

Answering member: Ms Nadine Dorries | Party: Conservative Party | Department: Department of Health and Social Care

Prior to COVID-19, Public Health England led the development of a Women's Reproductive Health Action Plan (WRHAP), taking a life course approach from

menstruation to menopause. Publication was delayed due to COVID-19. However, many of its actions are being taken forward and the document is being revised to take account of the impact and evolving landscape in relation to COVID-19. The high-level recommendations and findings from the revised plan will form a key element of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy that is planned for publication in 2021. The WHRAP will then be published as one of the Strategy implementation documents.

HC Deb 14 October 2020 | PQ 99621

[Hormone Replacement Therapy](#)

Asked by: McCabe, Steve

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the (a) effectiveness and (b) safety of using alternatives to Hormone Therapy Replacement patches.

Answering member: Jo Churchill | Department: Department of Health and Social Care

We have been working closely with all suppliers of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) preparations to maintain overall supply to patients. Supplies of alternative HRT products continue to remain available and the situation has been improving steadily since the end of February 2020.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has made an assessment of the clinical and cost effectiveness of HRT, including transdermal patches, and has made recommendations on their use in its guideline on menopause: diagnosis and management [NG23].

The safety and efficacy of individual products that are authorised for the relief of oestrogen deficiency symptoms associated with the menopause are assessed at the time each product is licensed and safety is continuously monitored once it is on the market.

Most post-marketing studies examine the safety of HRT products as a group and the safety of HRT products as a class has been kept under continuous review by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in conjunction with its independent scientific advisory body, the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) and its Expert Advisory Group on Medicines for Women's Health. Likewise, the safety of licensed medicines and herbal products that are used as alternatives to HRT are continuously monitored by the MHRA and advice sought from the CHM, as needed, when new safety issues arise.

HC Deb 03 August 2020 | PQ 73707

4 News items

People Management

18 October 2021

[How employers can support women going through menopause](#)

iNews

18 October 2021

[Menopause: How to talk to your boss about it, when it's the last thing you want to do](#)

Guardian

18 October 2021

['We have to better support women': MP leading the fight on menopause](#)

BBC News Online

13 October 2021

[Laser vagina menopause therapy shows no benefit in trial](#)

University of Sheffield press release

11 October 2021

[Menopause health app launched at University of Sheffield to give staff better personalised support](#)

Independent

6 October 2021

['Fear of being labelled hysterical: 1 in 10 women experience suicidal thoughts due to perimenopause](#)

Times

5 October 2021

[Employers must help staff going through the menopause, says Sophie](#)

Independent

3 October 2021

[Proposed law would make HRT free on prescription for women](#)

FT

19 August 2021

[Investing in the menopause can offer many rewards](#)

Guardian

9 May 2021

[Mission menopause: 'My hormones went off a cliff – and I'm not going to be ashamed'](#)

5

Useful links

[British Menopause Society](#)

[NHS.UK - Menopause](#)

Age UK – [6 things to know about the menopause](#)

[Menopause Support UK](#)

[Talking Menopause](#)

[The Menopause Exchange](#)

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

[Menopause at work](#)

Trades Union Congress (TUC)

[Menopause at work](#)

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

[Let's talk menopause](#)

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

[Menopause and women's health in later life](#)

World Menopause Month

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline

Updated 5 December 2019

[Menopause: diagnosis and management](#)

Department of Health and Social Care

Closed 13 June 2021

[Women's Health Strategy: Call for Evidence](#)

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